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facades

IMPROVING

COMMERCIAL

BUILDING FRONTS



Ontario

Ministry of
Municipal
Affairs

Bernard C. Grandmaître, Minister



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Introduction

The health and success of any commercial area depends on many factors; not only the obvious ones, such as sound business practice and a good retail mix, but also the attractiveness and appearance of the area. The streets and sidewalks of many commercial areas in Ontario have already been improved. Now it is time to turn our attention to the facades, or fronts of commercial buildings, facing onto these streets.

The facades of buildings can tell us a lot about the community's history and they have a major impact on the appearance of the area. They also help to give it a unique identity.

Many factors point to the need for facade improvements. Age, neglect, inappropriate or substandard remodelling and signage, all lead to a look which detracts from the commercial area and very often the business itself.

Facade improvement can mean a simple paint and clean-up job or more substantial remodelling. But getting to the point of making the improvements also demands time and thought. You want to be sure that you take advantage of your building's assets, that you arrive at a solution that you can afford and that will be good for business as well as an asset to the rest of the downtown or commercial area.

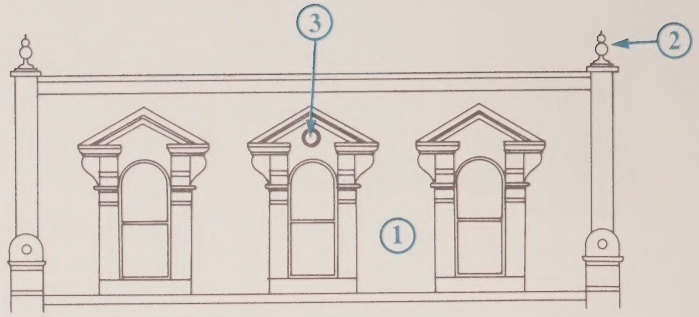
This booklet is designed to give you, the property owner, a basic step-by-step guide on how to improve the facade of your building. You will be introduced to the key elements of a facade, what to look for, how to plan and design your improvement and finally, how to get the job done.



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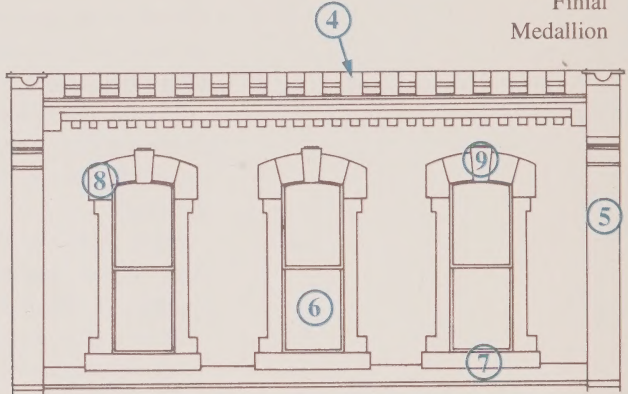
*hats on
the facade*

ROOF



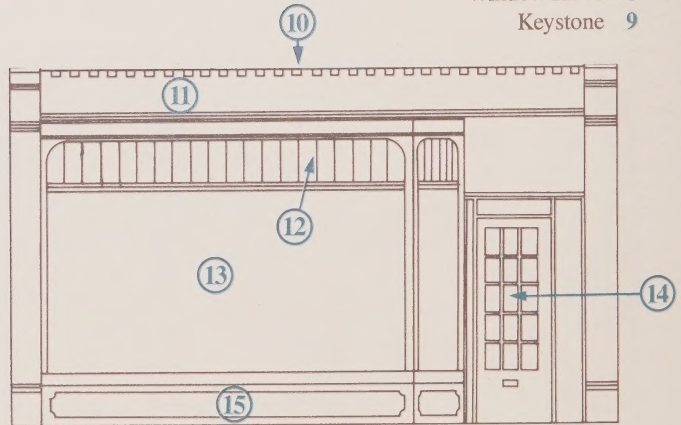
- Roof 1
- Finial 2
- Medallion 3

UPPER FACADE

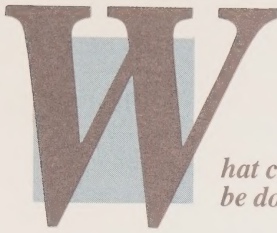


- Building Cornice 4
- Pier/Pilaster 5
- Window 6
- Window Sill 7
- Window Hood 8
- Keystone 9

STOREFRONT



- Storefront Cornice 10
- Signband & Sign 11
- Transom Window 12
- Display Window 13
- Storefront Door 14
- Basepanel 15



*hat can
be done*

Roof and cornice can be repaired and replaced with materials matching the colour of the other elements of the facade.

Decorative elements such as window frames, columns, piers, and cornices, can be repaired and painted.

Windows can be replaced and frames repainted.

Brick can be chemically cleaned.

The building can receive repainting treatment coordinated with others in the area and highlighting certain decorative elements.

The commercial signs can be replaced with new signs matching the architectural style of the building and character of the business.

Awnings can be installed.

The storefront can be rebuilt to provide additional display area, more light and an inviting character.

All entry doors can be replaced to reflect the standards and function of the building.



STEP ONE

Appreciating the Facade

Start by stepping across the street and looking at your storefront in relation to others on the street. Check its proportions and features to see if they fit with others or if they stand out too much. Do not be discouraged if your building is part of a row of facades which need improvement. Improvements to your facade could be a catalyst for improvements to the others. Alternatively, you can talk to your neighbours and make plans for a joint effort to improve the facades of your buildings.

Next it is best to do some research. Look for old photographs and talk to your Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee or Heritage Committee, if one exists. This initial research will give you a better idea of the building's original function and features. Knowing more about the history of your building will make it easier to take advantage of what is already there. Often improvements made over the years have hidden features which may be an important part of your new design.

Your municipality may have prepared a facade study for your commercial area. It will provide helpful advice for the

improvement of your facade. You should review these studies and any other guidelines dealing with design which are available for your area.

Once you have this background, you will want to set up an overall approach for

facade improvement. This may involve a complete redesign of your storefront or, more likely, some maintenance and repairs. Before doing this you will want to know all the work that will be required, including repairs, and what has to come first.



STEP TWO

Repairs

Structural repairs and upgrading to meet fire and safety standards are essential first steps in any overall improvement to the building's facade. Hiding these problems behind large signs or metal cladding will not make them go away. Your local building inspector, an architect or a contractor can help you in diagnosing problems and setting priorities for needed repairs.

After structural and, fire and life safety concerns have been evaluated, weather proofing should be considered. Buildings are often damaged by unwanted water in the building structure and its finishes. Water penetration through broken or damaged windows, especially in the upper facade, is a problem requiring immediate attention. As a general rule all roofs, eavestroughs, wall copings,

flashings, cladding, masonry, paint, windows and drainage should be kept in good condition and properly maintained.

Finally, building services such as electrical and plumbing systems have to be examined. Particular attention should be given to pipes located close to, or in exterior walls, as cold winters can make even new pipes burst. Also, pipes with potential problems should never be concealed behind new or renovated walls.



STEP THREE

Priorities and Design Plan

You are now ready to choose a design for the improvement of your facade. While your personal tastes are going to be a determining factor, the needed repairs, your budget and the architectural style of your building will influence your final choice and priorities.

Redesign involves the complete reconstruction of your facade to obtain an unusual, or new, image. This approach is costly and usually requires major reconstruction. Good redesign respects the building's context by maintaining characteristic height, width and setbacks in the area, and by respecting architectural styles of neighbouring buildings. While redesign may be used to improve an existing but poorly designed facade, the approach demands good design advice and quite often the extensive use of an architect and/or contractor. The extent of construction also precludes "do-it-yourself" work.

Restoration involves taking an existing facade's appearance back to a particular point in history (usually the time when it was first built). While the work may be extensive and require a considerable amount of time, it is the best approach for historically significant facades.





Restoration requires research on building materials, colours and the particular architectural style to achieve authenticity. Consequently, this may also be the most expensive approach for an owner to take.

Renovation is probably the most practical solution for most building owners. It involves the refurbishing and repair of a facade to bring back its original strengths and design. Since many facades work well, they do not need to be entirely modified. Often all that is required is a careful repainting, the removal of a poorly designed sign or the repair or replacement of a cornice.

This approach incorporates many of the best aspects of the other two strategies. Original elements that enhance the building are maintained and accentuated. However, complete historical accuracy is not necessary. Renovation

does not demand the removal of all the additions made over the years; it recognizes that good design from all periods can and should be maintained.

In comparison to the other approaches, renovation can be relatively inexpensive. Expensive stripping-off, or adding on, is minimized since the existing facade often serves as the basis for improvement.

STEP FOUR

Costs and Feasibility

Cost is an important factor in the decision to improve your facade. It is important to get a preliminary range of costs covering the full range of improvements and repairs as early as possible. This will assist in determining the feasibility of your intended improvements and in developing an overall budget.

Costs will vary with time, scheduling, type and quantity of work, materials and the accessibility of the work. Costs will also vary from region to region in the Province.

Architects, contractors, building supply firms, municipal building officials and other property owners who have made improvements can be a big help to you in arriving at cost estimates.

Once you have a range of estimates you should weigh the costs of improvements against anticipated spin-offs. You may want to weigh them over a long period particularly where large investments are concerned. Finally, you will prepare your budget for the project based on all of the above noted considerations.

These are 1986 cost estimates, which may vary by region and availability of materials.



Clean-up of a typical two-storey, simple modern facade and approximate costs:

• Repainting	\$800
• New glass and enlarged display window	600
	<hr/>
	\$1,400



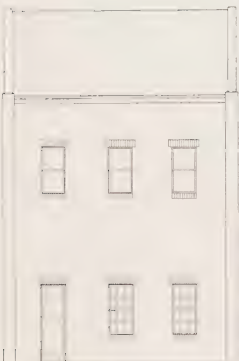
Basic improvements on a three-storey facade and approximate costs:

• Cornice repair	\$900
• Repainting	1,000
• Installation of new display window & door	6,000
• New sign	1,000
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	<u>\$8,900</u>




Renovation of a three-storey facade and approximate costs:

• Removal of projecting sign	\$400
• Installation of a new sign	1,600
• New display windows, door and transom	7,000
• Awning installation	2,000
• Window replacement	3,000
• Chemical cleaning	1,000
	<hr/>
	<u>\$15,000</u>



Improvements to rear of a commercial building:

• Clean-up of the external wall and minor repairs	\$1,000
• Installation of a back entry door to parking	500
• Installation of sign	2,000
	<hr/>
	<u>\$3,500</u>



STEP FIVE

Final drawings

Once you have determined which design approach is most feasible and your budget is established, it is necessary to get it on paper. Begin with a **base drawing** showing the existing facade using photographs and key measurements. Identify the location of problems and ensure that you account for all important features and relationship between them that you want to maintain. Using your base drawing have several **conceptual sketches** prepared. Based on these concepts, choose a design which fits best with the priorities and budget you developed earlier.

Now it is time to finalize your chosen design. The facade components are precisely located, and measured. Construction materials and colour are selected considering availability, ease of maintenance, cost, etc.. The **timetable** for construction and accompanying activities is drawn up.

STEP SIX

Building Permits

Obtaining the necessary building permit is best handled before a contractor is hired. Drawings and other documents outlining the work should be submitted to the municipal building official for approval. A special permit is required from the municipal council for alterations to heritage properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. Remember to take account of the time it takes to get these approvals when establishing a timetable for your project.

Some facade improvements such as simple painting or cleaning may not require a building permit. However, it is best to check with the building department of your municipality before commencing any such work. This will avoid unforeseen delays once your project has started.

STEP SEVEN

Hiring a Contractor

Quality and price are the two most important considerations when hiring a contractor. In looking for quality, you should ask the following questions:

- ***Is he understandable and straightforward?*** The contractor should be able to explain to you clearly and simply any aspects of the construction process.
- ***Is he flexible?*** In other words is he open to suggestions and what is his track record with other renovations?
- ***Is he reliable?*** Ask whether he generally sticks to estimates and ask those who have dealt with him before, about whether he is on time and how easy he is to reach during construction and afterwards.
- ***Is he covered?*** Requirements for carrying adequate insurance, Workmen's Compensation and bonds should be covered clearly in the contract.
- ***Is he available?*** It is always good to check at the outset to see if the contractor is available when wanted.

Once you have a list of quality contractors, it is time to “call for prices” by getting competitive bids from at least three contractors. You must supply each contractor with a set of working drawings and written requirements. These requirements should include:

- the deadline for submission of bids and completion of work
- hours of the day in which work will be allowed
- maintenance of unobstructed access
- cleanup and removal of debris.

Once you have received the bids and review them for price and quality, a contract can be worked out based on the successful bid.



STEP EIGHT

Maintenance

Maintenance is a primary concern in any facade improvement project. It is particularly important once improvements have been made. Neglect, time and weather can quickly take their toll on a facade. A **regular schedule** of cleaning and repair, as well as check-ups on decorative features, will ensure that you are getting the maximum benefit from your investment. This maintenance schedule will also help to ensure durability of your facade over the long term. Key features which should be part of that schedule include:

- masonry or other cladding
- windows
- doors
- signage.

Maintenance can also be a factor in choosing the design and features of your facade. Ease and cost of maintenance should be considered. Since the improvements you intend to make may require regular ongoing maintenance costs, such

costs should be factored into your investment decision. Discussions with professionals knowledgeable about the materials and features you plan to use will help in determining maintenance costs. It is also helpful to talk to other property owners who have undertaken similar improvements.

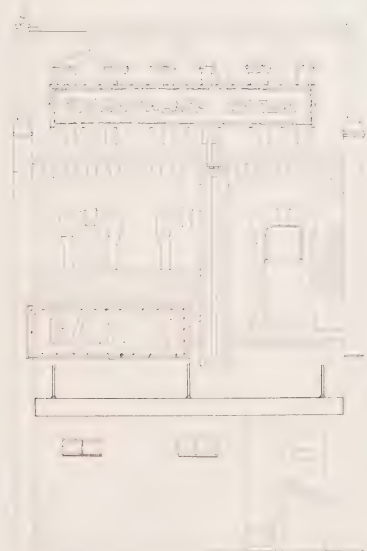


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*hat are
the benefits*

By investing in facade improvements, you, the property owner, show that you consider appearance and image to be an important means of attracting customers. An improved facade is a sound investment. It will help create a pleasant business atmosphere which is sure to attract more people. With increased customer traffic, sales will expand. In addition, a revitalized commercial district creates employment for the community as well as a good tax base for the municipality.

Finally, it goes without saying that improvements to your building, if done properly, will increase its value and thereby have a positive impact on your overall investment.





final word

You have probably concluded that improving your facade is not something you can do on your own. Municipal building officials and planning staff can help with questions you may have about your building and others on the street.

Guidelines and facade studies for your commercial area may already be available and can assist you in making decisions about design. This booklet encourages you to also talk to architects and contractors to help you through the steps you will have to take to arrive at a successful improvement.

For further information a detailed handbook on commercial facade improvements is available: *Planning and Design for Commercial Facade Improvements*. This publication is available from the Ontario Government Bookstore at a cost of \$5.00.

A facade improvement slide presentation with recorded narration is also available to groups. Contact:

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